DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 466 430 SO 033 958

TITLE	Memorandum Regarding the Enlistment of Navajo Indians. Teaching with Documents.
INSTITUTION	National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	2002-06-18
NOTE	15p.; Designed and developed by the Education Staff of the National Archives and Records Administration. Photographic images of primary sources may not reproduce adequately. For additional "Teaching with Documents" materials, see SO 033 954-957.
AVAILABLE FROM	National Archives and Records Administration, 8601 Adelphi Road, College Park, MD 20740-6001. Tel: 866-272-6272 (Toll Free); Fax: 301-837-0483; e-mail: orderstatus@nara.gov. For full text: http://www.archives.gov/digital_classroom/teaching_with_documents.html.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Classroom - Teacher (052)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Standards; Intermediate Grades; *Military Service; National Standards; *Navajo (Nation); *Primary Sources; Secondary Education; Social Studies; Student Research; Teacher Developed Materials; *World War II
IDENTIFIERS	Document Analysis; National Civics and Government Standards; National History Standards

ABSTRACT

On the battlefield during World War II, maintaining military secrecy went far beyond poster campaigns because it was essential for victory and breaking enemy codes was necessary to gain the advantage and shorten the war. The ability to send and receive codes without the risk of the enemy deciphering the transmission was the most desirable end result of military secrecy. The U.S. Marine Corps, in an effort to find quicker and more secure ways to send and receive code, enlisted Navajos as code talkers. Philip Johnston was the initiator of the program to enlist and train the Navajos as messengers. On February 28, 1942, four Navajos assisted Johnston in demonstrating his idea that, with proper training, Navajos who fit the age and education requirements for military service could be taught to transmit messages in their native language. It is estimated that between 375 to 420 Navajos eventually served as code talkers. This lesson plan uses Major General Clayton Vogel's letter of recommendation to enlist the Navajos in the military for this purpose as a primary source to study this aspect of World War II. The lesson plan correlates with the history and civics and government standards. It suggests six varied classroom activities for students to complete. In addition to General Vogel's letter, the lesson plan provides a Navajo dictionary (Figure 1) and a written document analysis worksheet. (BT)

U.S. NATIONAL ARCHIVES & RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

www.archives.gov

June 18, 2002

TEACHING WITH DOCUMENTS

Memorandum Regarding the Enlistment of Navajo Indians

National Archives and Records Administration
700 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20408
1-866-325-7208

http://www.archives.gov/digital_classroom/lessons/code_talkers/code_talkers.html

2002

TEACHING WITH DOCUMENTS LESSON PLAN

Memorandum Regarding the Enlistment of Navajo Indians

Standards Correlations

This lesson correlates to the National History Standards.

- Era 8-The Great Depression and World War II (1929-1945)
  - Standard 3B-The student understands World War II and how the Allies prevailed.

This lesson correlates to the National Standards for Civics and Government.

- Standard V.C.6.- Students should be able to evaluate, take, and defend positions on issues regarding the personal responsibilities of citizens in American constitutional democracy.

Cross-curricular Connections

Share this exercise with your history, government, and language arts colleagues.

List of Documents

1. Maj. Gen. Clayton B. Vogel's Recommendation Letter

2. Figure 1, Navajo Dictionary

Historical Background

Maintaining secrecy, particularly during wartime, is vital to the national security of every country. Accomplishing this on the homefront during World War II was one objective of the Office of War Information. The office created propaganda posters that alerted American citizens to the presence of enemy spies and saboteurs lurking just below the surface of American society. On the battlefield, maintaining military secrecy went far beyond poster campaigns because it was essential for victory, and breaking enemy codes was necessary to gain the advantage and shorten the war. The ability to send and receive codes without the risk of the enemy deciphering the transmission was the most desirable end result of military secrecy. This ability, however, often required hours of encrypting and decrypting the code to ensure the highest security of the message. During World War II, the U.S. Marine Corps, in an effort to find quicker and more secure ways to send and receive code enlisted Navajos as "code talkers."

Philip Johnston was the initiator of the Marine Corps' program to enlist and train the Navajos as messengers. Although Johnston was not a Navajo, he grew up on a Navajo reservation as the son of a missionary and became familiar with the people and their language. Johnston was also a World War I veteran and knew about the military's desire to send and receive messages in an unbreakable code. According to a 1970 interview with Johnston and a paper he wrote entitled "Indian Jargon Won Our Battles," he hit upon the idea of enlisting Navajos as signalmen early in 1942 when he read a newspaper story about the Army's use of several Native Americans during training maneuvers with an armored division in Louisiana. The article stated that the Army included Native Americans during these maneuvers on the basis of the experiences of the Canadian Army in World War I, when the Native Americans acted as signalmen against the Germans to send secure messages about shortages of supplies or ammunition.

The Army's program, however, was never given the priority that the U.S. Marine Corps assigned to Johnston's idea in 1942. According to Johnston, the day after he read the article, he went to the Naval Office in Los Angeles, California, and told them the story. Believing it had possibilities, the office sent Johnston to the headquarters of the Eleventh Naval District in San Diego, which was convinced that if Johnston's idea could be accomplished it would be a "marvelous thing," and sent Johnston to Camp Elliott in San Diego to meet Major James E. Jones. It took Johnston some time to convince Major Jones about the potential for using a Native American code, but after Johnston spoke a few Navajo words to the baffled major, Jones decided to give Johnston's idea a trial run with actual Navajos. Within two weeks, Johnston assembled four Navajos in the Los Angeles area and arranged to meet Major Jones back at Camp Elliott on February 27, 1942, with the demonstration to occur the next day.

Prior to his arrival at Camp Elliott, Johnston sent a preliminary report to Major Jones and Maj. Gen. Clayton B. Vogel, the commanding general of the Amphibious Corps, Pacific

Fleet, that explained the many reasons he believed that the Navajo offered the best possibility for recruitment as signalmen. Included in the report was a description of Johnston's own knowledge of the Navajo gained through his childhood experiences, general background information on the status of Native Americans that gave population statistics, and a specific explanation of the potential of the Navajo language as a military code. It stressed the complexity of the Navajo language and the fact that it remained mostly "'unwritten' because an alphabet or other symbols of purely native origin" did not exist, with the exception of adaptations by American scholars, anthropologists, and Franciscan Fathers, who compiled a Navajo dictionary. Furthermore, the report noted that the languages of Native American tribes varied so significantly that one group of Native Americans could not understand another's language.

Johnston's proposal also discussed how fluency in reading Navajo could be obtained only by those "individuals who are first highly educated in English, and who, in turn, have made a profound study of Navajo, both in spoken and written form." Besides himself, Johnston alleged that very few people in the world could understand the Navajo language. Johnston's report concluded by recommending the Navajo, Sioux, Chippewa, and Pima-Papago as tribes that were available for recruitment based on the size of their population. Because of Johnston's intimate knowledge of the Navajo reservation, its people, and the Navajo language-- and because the Navajo had the largest population of Native American-- he believed that they offered the best possibility for recruitment. Johnston thought that the tribe's seclusion made the Navajo a culturally and linguistically autonomous people compared with other native groups. The Navajo reservation, which was located largely in Arizona but which comprised portions of New Mexico, Utah, and Colorado, totaled an area of 25,000 square miles of isolated and sparsely populated land that was largely inaccessible due to unimproved roads and trails. Johnston also believed that many Navajos had been given an education that adequately prepared them for jobs outside their traditional life-styles. In the years prior to 1942, Navajo children attended government-established schools on the reservation that taught English grammar. A large number of them also attended schools outside of the reservation that taught native arts and crafts and offered classes in trades and occupations. With proper training, Johnston was sure that Navajos who fit the age and education requirements for military service could be taught to transmit messages in their native language.

On February 28, 1942, the four Navajos assisted Johnston in demonstrating his idea. Prior to the demonstration, General Vogel had installed a telephone connection between two offices and wrote out six messages that were typical of those sent during combat. One of those messages read "Enemy expected to make tank and dive bomber attack at dawn." The Navajo managed to transmit the message almost verbatim: "Enemy tank dive bomber expected to attack this morning." The remaining messages were translated with similar proficiency, which duly impressed General Vogel. A week later on, March 6, 1942, Vogel wrote a letter to the U.S. Marine Corps commandant recommending the initial recruitment of two hundred Navajos for the Amphibious Corps, Pacific Fleet. The letter is featured with this article.

After detailing the nature of the demonstration and its success, Vogel outlined in his letter the advantages, as he saw them, to Johnston's proposal. Vogel noted that the Navajo dialect was regarded as "completely unintelligible" to other tribes, and that only twenty-eight Americans were thought to possess a more than superficial knowledge of the language. In addition, Vogel noted that the Navajo was the only tribe, according to Johnston, that had not yet been infiltrated by Germans posing as students, art dealers, and anthropologists in order to study the various tribal dialects of American Indians. Interestingly, this point was to become somewhat moot, as the code talkers were never deployed on the European front, the Marine Corps operations being primarily situated in the Pacific Theater. But the statement nevertheless revealed the priorities of Vogel and the military on the whole-- to maintain in their communications the utmost secrecy and security.

Although Vogel's letter was firm in its support, it nevertheless contained allusions to some of the problems that would trouble the project as it progressed. Prior to the demonstration, the Navajo demonstrators, Vogel stated, were allowed a few minutes to "improvise" words for military terminology not in the Navajo vocabulary. While the demonstration itself was a success, over the next year, the development of a consistent and universally applicable Navajo code for the countless military terms would prove to be a major obstacle. Vogel also stated, on the basis of Johnston's assurances, that one thousand Navajos with necessary qualifications could be found for the project. When the program eventually expanded, however, meeting such expectations proved difficult.

While these concerns were not to manifest themselves for some time, others found more immediate reasons to object. One colonel stated that the supposed primary advantage of the code talkers over the encrypted system -- speed -- was actually of little benefit because in field action situations, when speed was of the essence, messages were usually sent verbatim without code because the enemy would not have time to intercept them and respond. The colonel was also reluctant to endorse a proposal that would "combat directing officers depending on an order being translated" in a language that they themselves had no chance of understanding.

Despite these objections, the initial recruitment of code talkers was approved, with the stipulation that the Navajo meet the normally required qualifications for enlistment, undergo the same seven-week training as any other recruit, and meet strict linguistic qualifications in English and Navajo, qualifications not easily attained. On May 5, 1942, the first 29 Navajos arrived at the Recruit Depot in San Diego, California, for basic training, where they trained in the standard procedures of the military and in weapons use. Afterward, they moved to Fleet Marine Force Training Center at Camp Elliott, where they received special courses in the transmission of messages and instruction in radio operation.

It was at Camp Elliott that the initial recruits, along with communications personnel, designed the first Navajo code. This code consisted of 211 words, most of which were Navajo terms that had been imbued with new, distinctly military meanings in order to compensate for the lack of military terminology in the Navajo vocabulary. For example,

"fighter plane" was called "da-ha-tih-hi," which means "humming bird" in Navajo, and "dive bomber" was called "gini," which means "chicken hawk." In addition, the code talkers also designed a system that signified the twenty-six letters of the English alphabet. For example, the letter A was "wol-la-chee," which means "ant" in Navajo, and the letter E was "dzeh," which means "elk." Words that were not included in the 211 terms were spelled out using the alphabet (see Figure 1).

The Navajo soon demonstrated their ability to memorize the code and to send messages under adverse conditions similar to military action, successfully transmitting the code from planes, tanks, or fast-moving positions. The program was deemed so successful that an additional two hundred Navajos were recommended for recruitment as messengers on July 20, 1942. This prompted Philip Johnston to offer his services as a staff sergeant to aid in the development of the code talker program. On October 2, 1942, Johnston enlisted and began training his first class in November and spent the remainder of the war training additional Navajo recruits. After the new recruits went through the Marine Corps' basic training course, they came to Johnston for what he termed an "extremely intensive" eight-week messenger training course.

As the code talker program grew, so did the development of the code. A cryptographer who monitored the code talkers' transmissions concluded that the code might be broken because using the alphabet to spell out words not in the Navajos' vocabulary produced too many repetitions. To alleviate this problem, the code talker alphabet grew from twenty-six to forty-four terms by creating alternatives for the most frequently repeated letters -- E, T, A, O, I, N, S, H, R, D, L, and U. For example, in addition to designating "wol-la-chee," meaning "ant," for A "be-la-sana" and "tse-nihl" which meant "apple" and "axe," respectively, were also designated for the letter A. The original 211 vocabulary terms were also expanded to 411.

By April of 1943, the additional 200 recruits had almost completed their training, while the initial recruits were attached to Marine divisions in the South Pacific and performing communication and general Marine duties. The Marine Corps by this time had compiled recommendations of Marine Divisions in the field and had determined that the program should be continued and expanded further. According to the new proposal, an additional 303 Navajos were to be recruited at 50 men per month for six months. The enlistment of additional Navajos was not a simple task, however, because many new recruits were not qualified. In addition, those Navajos who volunteered through Selective Service were often sent to other branches of the military. The Marine Corps attempted to alleviate this problem by reducing their quota to twenty-five men per month. It made arrangements with Selective Service to activate voluntary induction of Navajos, and even tried to transfer Navajos from the Army into the Marine Corps, but its goal still remained unattainable.

With the recruitment and training program for the code talkers facing curtailment on the homefront, the Navajo code talkers assigned to the South Pacific experienced their own varying degrees of success. The official Marine Corps records contain very few battle reports related to the Navajo code talkers, citing activity only at Guam, Palau, Okinawa

and Iwo Jima. Reports from Iwo Jima, typical of those related to code talkers from the front, highlight both the limitations and the strengths of the program. One of the primary limitations was the aforementioned lack of available qualified Navajos to participate. Many offices, regiments, and battalions remained without new recruits, which of course rendered communication in code between these offices and those with the code talkers impossible. Recommendations called for drastic increases in the number of recruits. The limited recruiting successes, however, made following through with these recommendations difficult.

Despite the development of unique military terms for the Navajo code, the lack of military terminology in the original Navajo vocabulary remained an obstacle, another limitation that became apparent in the Battle of Iwo Jima. Because Navajos had trained at different times and worked in different locales, the development of certain dialects and modified vocabularies was inevitable. As a consequence, dialects were different among the code talkers and were detrimental to effective communication between units. To offset this problem, officers frequently exchanged Navajos from one division into another to try to endure that the Navajo be "thoroughly trained in a standard Navajo military dictionary." Quarterly training sessions were advised, in which messengers could review standard Navajo military code, as well as such duties as radio procedure and radio headings, to maintain a high degree of efficiency.

Even with these limitations, however, overall assessments from Iwo Jima and other battles showed that there was an interest to continue the development of Navajos as code talkers. The primary strengths of the code talkers was the amount of secrecy that they ensured and the versatility with which they could be used. When compared to other messengers, the Navajos provided a valuable line of communication by radio that was both secure and error-free. Capt. Ralph J. Sturkey, in his Iwo Jima Battle Report, called the Navajo code the "the simplest, fastest, and most reliable means" available to transmit secret orders by radio and telephone circuits exposed to enemy wire-tapping. Captain Sturkey also wrote that the "full value of Navajo Talkers would not be appreciated until the Commander and Staff they are serving gains confidence in their ability." In addition to functioning as messengers who provided a secure means of communication, the Navajos proved at Iwo Jima and other battles to be excellent general-duty Marines, useful in a variety of operations.

It is estimated that between 375 to 420 Navajos served as code talkers. The Navajo code talker program was highly classified throughout the war and remained so until 1968. Returning home on buses without parades or fanfare and sworn to secrecy about the existence of the code, the Navajo code talkers are only recently making their way into popular culture and mainstream American history. The "Honoring the Code Talkers Act," introduced by Senator Jeff Bingaman from New Mexico in April 2000, and signed into law December 21, 2000, called for the recognition of the Navajo code talkers. During a ceremony at the U.S. Capitol on July 26, 2001, the first 29 soldiers received the Congressional Gold Medal. The Congressional Silver Medal was presented to the remaining Navajos who later qualified to be code talkers. Senator Bingaman's legislation was one attempt to answer the question of how the United States should document and remember the Navajo code talkers.

Classroom Activities

1. Distribute copies of the document to students or project it on an overhead screen. Ask one student to read it aloud while the others follow along. Lead a class discussion by posing the following questions: What type of document is it? What is the date of the document? Who was the intended recipient? Who created it? For what purpose was it created?

2. Divide students into groups of three and provide each group with a copy of figure 1 (Navajo dictionary). Assign one student the role of a Marine Corps staff member and the other two the role of Navajo messengers. Ask students to practice sending messages within their group using the method described in item 2 of the featured document. Discuss with students the exercise and ask them to identify the benefits and liabilities of such a system of sending and translating messages during wartime.

3. Inform students that Major Howard Conner, a signal officer from the 5th Marine Division on Iwo Jima, remarked to Philip Johnston after the war, "Were it not for the Navajos, the Marines never would have taken Iwo Jima." Direct students to conduct research into the Battle of Iwo Jima to determine the validity of this statement and write one page supporting or refuting the claim.

4. Tell students that between 375 and 420 Navajos served as code talkers during World War II. Explain that on December 21, 2000, the Honoring the Code Talkers Act (Public Law 106-554), introduced by Senator Jeff Bingaman of New Mexico, was signed into law. Encourage students to read the text of the law, available online at http://bingaman.senate.gov/code_talkers/legislation/legislation.html, and find out what the law will do. Direct students to brainstorm a list of other lesser-known individuals or groups that contributed to the Allied victory in World War II and list ways their contributions have been recognized and honored. Their list might include Dorie Miller, the 442nd Infantry, and "Rosie the Riveter." Ask students to consider what factors affect such honors.

5. Ask student volunteers to watch the movie *Windtalkers*, released by MGM, and write a review of the movie's historical accuracy (www.mgm.com/windtalkers).

6. Divide students into five groups and assign each group one of the following periods: the Revolutionary War, The Civil War, World War I, World War II, and the modern era. Ask student groups to conduct research into the codes and code-breaking methods of their assigned period. Direct each group to demonstrate a code-breaking method from their assigned period to the class. (Note: The National Security Agency [NSA] operates the National Cryptologic Museum in Maryland.

Its website, http://www.nsa.gov/museum/tour.html may be a good starting point for student research).

15/11-jwa

Subject: Enlistment of Navaho Indians.

4. It is therefore recommended that an effort be made to enlist 200 Navaho Indians for this force. In addition to linguistic qualifications in English and their tribal dialect they should have the physical qualifications necessary for messengers.

CLAYTON B. VOGEL

Copy to CG, AFAF.

Document 1: Maj. Gen. Clayton B. Vogel's Recommendation Letter, Page 1

(291)
1535
15/11-jwa

HEADQUARTERS,
AMPHIBIOUS FORCE, PACIFIC FLEET,
CAMP ELLIOTT, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

March 6, 1942

From: The Commanding General.
To: The Commandant, U. S. Marine Corps.

Subject: Enlistment of Navaho Indians.

Enclosures: (A) Brochure by Mr. Philip Johnston, with maps.
(B) Messages used in demonstration.

1. Mr. Philip Johnston of Los Angeles recently offered his services to this force to demonstrate the use of Indians for the transmission of messages by telephone and voice-radio. His offer was accepted and the demonstration was held for the Commanding General and his staff.

2. The demonstration was interesting and successful. Messages were transmitted and received almost verbatim. In conducting the demonstration messages were written by a member of the staff and handed to the Indian; he would transmit the messages in his tribal dialect and the Indian on the other end would write them down in English. The text of messages as written and received are enclosed. The Indians do not have many military terms in their dialect so it was necessary to give them a few minutes, before the demonstration, to improvise words for dive-bombing, anti-tank gun, etc.

3. Mr. Johnston stated that the Navaho is the only tribe in the United States that has not been infested with German students during the past twenty years. These Germans, studying the various tribal dialects under the guise of art students, anthropologists, etc., have undoubtedly attained a good working knowledge of all tribal dialects except Navaho. For this reason the Navaho is the only tribe available offering complete security for the type of work under consideration. It is noted in Mr. Johnston's article (enclosed) that the Navaho is the largest tribe but the lowest in literacy. He stated, however, that 1,000 — if that many were needed — could be found with the necessary qualifications. It should also be noted that the Navaho tribal dialect is completely unintelligible to all other tribes and all other people, with the possible exception of as many as 28 Americans who have made a study of the dialect. This dialect is thus equivalent to a secret code to the enemy, and admirably suited for rapid, secure communication.

FIGURE 1
Navajo Dictionary

ENGLISH LETTER	NAVAHO WORD	MEANING
A	Wol-la-chee	Ant
B	Shush	Bear
C	Moasi	Cat
D	Be	Deer
E	Dzeh	Elk
F	Ma-e	Fox
G	Klizzie	Goat
H	Lin	Horse
I	Tkin	Ice
J	Tkele-cho-gi	Jackass
K	Klizzie-yazzie	Kid
L	Dibeh-yazzie	Lamb
M	Na-as-tso-si	Mouse
N	Nesh-chee	Nut
O	Ne-ahs-jah	Owl
P	Bi-so-dih	Pig
Q	Ca-yeilth	Quiver
R	Gah	Rabbit
S	Dibeh	Sheep
T	Than-zie	Turkey
U	No-da-ih	Ute
V	A-keh-di-glini	Victor
W	Gloe-ih	Weasel
X	Al-an-as-dzoh	Cross
Y	Tsah-as-zih	Yucca
Z	Besh-do-gliz	Zinc

ENGLISH WORD	NAVAHO WORD	MEANING
Corps	Din-neh-ih	Clan
Switchboard	Ya-ih-e-tih-ih	Central
Dive Bomber	Gini	Chicken Hawk
Torpedo plane	Tas-chizzie	Swallow
Observation plane	Ne-as-jah	Owl
Fighter plane	Da-he-tih-hi	Humming Bird
Bomber	Jay-sho	Buzzard
Alaska	Beh-hga	With-Winter
America	Ne-he-Mah	Our Mother
Australia	Cha-yes-desi	Rolled Hat
Germany	Besh-be-cha-he	Iron Hat
Philippines	Ke-yah-da-na-lhe	Floating Land

Written Document Analysis Worksheet

1. TYPE OF DOCUMENT (Check one):

___ Newspaper	___ Map	___ Advertisement
___ Letter	___ Telegram	___ Congressional record
___ Patent	___ Press release	___ Census report
___ Memorandum	___ Report	___ Other

2. UNIQUE PHYSICAL QUALITIES OF THE DOCUMENT (Check one or more):

___ Interesting letterhead	___ Notations
___ Handwritten	___ "RECEIVED" stamp
___ Typed	___ Other
___ Seals	

3. DATE(S) OF DOCUMENT:
_____

4. AUTHOR (OR CREATOR) OF THE DOCUMENT:
_____

POSITION (TITLE):
_____

5. FOR WHAT AUDIENCE WAS THE DOCUMENT WRITTEN?
_____

6. DOCUMENT INFORMATION (There are many possible ways to answer A-E.)

A. List three things the author said that you think are important:
_____
_____
_____

B. Why do you think this document was written?
_____
_____

C. What evidence in the document helps you know why it was written? Quote from the document.
_____
_____

D. List two things the document tells you about life in the United States at the time it was written:
_____
_____

E. Write a question to the author that is left unanswered by the document:
_____
_____

Designed and developed by the
Education Staff, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC 20408.

U.S. National Archives & Records Administration
700 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20408 • 1-86-NARA-NARA • 1-866-272-6272

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

NOTICE

Reproduction Basis

☐ This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.

☑ This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").